

HOUSTON POST
19 JUNE 1981

Coup conspiracy case going to jury today

By LAURIE PATERNOSTER
Post Reporter

NEW ORLEANS — A federal court jury here, after hearing three days of often stormy testimony, Friday will deliberate the fate of three of 10 men accused of conspiring to overthrow the government of Dominica.

Lawyers for both sides will spend much of the morning in closing arguments and the case is expected to go to the jury by early afternoon.

Stephen Don Black, 27, of Birmingham, Ala., Michael Norris, 21, of Tuscaloosa, Ala., and Joe Danny Hawkins, 37, of Jackson, Miss., have all pleaded not guilty to the seven federal charges, which include breaches of the neutrality and firearms acts.

ALL 10 OF THE ACCUSED MEN were called to testify before the jury, with the government and the defense taking an even split. Black, Hawkins and Norris each took a turn on the stand and called admitted conspirators George T. Malvaney, 21, of Jackson, Miss., and William B. Waldrop, 33, of Braxton, Miss., to testify in their behalf.

Exchanging some often heated words with Assistant U.S. Attorneys Lindsay Larson and Pauline Hardin, Hawkins and Black continually stressed their beliefs that the attempted coup on the Caribbean island had been planned with the U.S. government's knowledge and consent.

"It was laid down to me by (Michael) Perdue that it was a covert operation and, as is common knowledge, the U.S. government engages in covert operations," Black testified. "I believed it to be in the best interest of the U.S. government because this whole area is vital to our security."

PERDUE, 32, OF HOUSTON has testified he planned the coup attempt and gathered financing and men to carry the plot out. Perdue has pleaded guilty to one count for a lesser sentence in return for cooperating with the government. Black testified Perdue led him to believe he had contacts in the State Department and possibly working for the CIA.

"I thought James White was a code name for the CIA contact but now the government claims it is going to indict him so I don't know," Black said.

White was one of a group of men the mercenaries have testified contributed funds to their venture. White, a former Longview businessman, was said to have given \$40,000 to the group and has refused to testify before a federal grand jury still investigating the case.

After being continually reprimanded by U.S. District Court Judge Lansing Mitchell for sailing into rapid-fire political diatribes, Black admitted to the court he was "the adventurous type" and was low on

money when he decided to join the group.

"I supported Reagan and the reason why is we need a strong national defense. More and more countries are being swallowed up by communism and it was important to stop it (in Dominica) because it is in our hemisphere," Black said.

Hawkins, unleashing the most explosive temperament of the 10, accused the government of inferring his guilt of attempting the overthrow of a lawful government when "you don't know who was who."

"NEITHER SIDE WAS IN control — it was either the commies or the good guys who were going to come out stronger and I sided with the good guys," he said.

Describing himself as a "househusband" who could not get a job because of a prison record, Hawkins admitted recruiting Waldrop and Malvaney for the group and said he researched the island thoroughly before he agreed to participate.

"I'm a pretty strong anti-communist and it looked like a good thing to do. It seemed to me the U.S. government has failed (to prevent communism) over the past 20 years and if we had been left alone on this deal we'd have worked it out pretty well," Hawkins testified.

"I would have gotten \$3,000 to \$5,000 for going, but the money meant absolutely nothing to me in this case — all they had to do was pay my way down there and I was glad to help." In other testimony Wednesday, Norris said, "I don't think I'd have gone if it hadn't been for the communist movement. I said several times I would have gone even if it hadn't been for the money."

Wolfgang Droege, 31, of Toronto, testified he personally recruited Black and Hawkins and fully explained the coup was to replace one government with another.

DROEGE SAID PERDUE TOLD the group the night of their April 27 arrest he would "get the best deal for all of us." Droege testified, "At first I didn't consider myself guilty but afterwards I realized I broke the law. Then my lawyer told me when the captain leaves the ship, you'd better follow."

Larry Jacklin, 23, of Listowell, Ont., testified he thought "the whole thing was legal until we were arrested" and that Perdue had promised a bloodless coup.

"If you had been fired on in Dominica, would you have fired back?" Larson asked. "If I had been fired on in New Orleans I would have fired back," Jacklin answered. He said Perdue told him the night after he changed his plea to guilty that Perdue had an "ace in the hole and was going to leave us all sitting in the dust. He had made his deal and the hell with the rest of us; we could make up our own minds."